Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to the Syrian Arab Republic*

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* Circulated in the language of submission and Arabic only.

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with his mandate contained in Human Rights Council resolution 23/8 and at the invitation of the Government, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Chaloka Beyani, undertook an official visit to the Syrian Arab Republic between 16 and 19 May 2015. The objective was to examine the human rights situation of internally displaced persons in the context of the ongoing conflict that has engulfed the country since 2011, to consider legal frameworks, policies and programmes to respond to the displacement crisis and to make a series of recommendations to the Government and other national and international stakeholders.

2. The Special Rapporteur travelled to Damascus and the surrounding areas of rural Damascus, and the cities of Homs and Latakia. He consulted widely with government representatives, United Nations and other international and national humanitarian and human rights partners, and civil society. His visit included visits to numerous collective shelters for internally displaced persons in order to consult directly with them, to see their situations first-hand and to hear from them about their conditions, needs and expectations.

3. The Special Rapporteur thanks the Government for its invitation to visit and for the high-level meetings arranged. He also thanks the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies in the Syrian Arab Republic for facilitating all aspects of his visit and the numerous national and international humanitarian partners for their assistance.

4. The Special Rapporteur takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the civilian population, which has borne the brunt of the violence. In particular he recognizes those who have opened their homes to internally displaced persons and shared what little they have, and who continue to demonstrate their humanity and that hope exists for a brighter future for the Syrian people. Equally, many humanitarian workers from both United Nations agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations are putting their lives at risk performing their functions often in extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances.[1] Many volunteers are dedicating their time and energy to assisting internally displaced persons and providing essential support in collective shelters.

5. The prevailing security situation at the time of the Special Rapporteur's visit placed numerous restrictions on his ability to travel widely and access collective centres for internally displaced persons around the country. While he visited several such centres in the vicinity of Damascus, Homs and Latakia, he regrets that he was not able to freely visit all locations owing to security issues and restrictions on access to certain locations and centres. The present report is therefore informed by verified and credible information provided by the United Nations, the Government and other national and international civil society actors.

6. This is the second report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 15 May 2013, in its resolution 67/262, the General Assembly requested him to submit to it a report on the situation of internally displaced persons in the country in terms of safety and their basic rights and livelihoods, and to provide recommendations with a view to meeting assistance and protection needs and strengthening the effectiveness of the international response to displacement (para. 21). The report was subsequently submitted on 15 July 2013(see A/67/931).

7. While the official visit of the Special Rapporteur took place in May 2015, the present report takes into account major developments relevant to internal displacement and the situation of internally displaced persons during the drafting period. He shared his

[1] As of the end of 2014, there had been 92 incidents against humanitarian workers in the Syrian Arab Republic. See https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/report/country.

preliminary findings with the Government at the conclusion of his visit.[2] In view of the gravity of the situation, he urges the Government to continue to cooperate with his mandate to ensure the protection of the human rights of internally displaced persons.

II. Context, causes and patterns of internal displacement

8. The Syrian civil unrest began in March 2011 in the southern city of Dara'a. After security forces opened fire on demonstrators protesting about the arrest and torture of teenagers accused of painting revolutionary slogans, killing several people, the unrest spread and there were nationwide protests calling for the President to resign. As the Government moved to forcefully supress the protest movement, hundreds of thousands took to the streets resulting in confrontations with security forces. Over the coming months, the violence escalated and non-State armed groups formed in several cities and towns, including in the governorates of Dara'a, Idlib, Tartus, Latakia, Aleppo, Homs and Damascus. On 15 July 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross declared the Syrian conflict a civil war/non-international armed conflict. As fighting escalated in urban areas, the number of internally displaced persons increased dramatically.

9. The self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as Daesh, has its origins in Iraq. Following the death in 2006 of its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaida in Iraq created an umbrella organization, Islamic State in Iraq. In January 2012, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Islamic State in Iraq set up al-Nusrah Front to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic under the leadership of an Al-Qaida commander known as Abu Mohammad al-Julani. In April 2013, Al-Baghdadi merged forces operating in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and announced the creation of "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) with the objective of establishing an Islamic "caliphate" with himself at the helm. Abu Mohammad al-Julani of al-Nusrah Front rejected the move, however many fighters loyal to Baghdadi split from al-Nusrah Front and helped ISIL make large inroads in the country and expand its offensives in a number of territories in northern, central and southern parts of the country. The horror of the conflict and the brutality of ISIL fighters led to further mass displacement of populations.

10. From 2011 onwards, numerous armed clashes led to the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians from different locations. Around 1 million people were displaced due to fighting in Aleppo in October and November 2013, while hundreds of thousands more were displaced from Aleppo as a result of barrel bombs and shelling as of mid-December 2013. By 2013, the extent and multiple fronts of the conflict had led to an average of 9,500 persons being displaced each day.[3] By June 2014, close to half of the entire population had fled their homes, with almost a third of the population displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic, the remainder having fled to neighbouring countries. In 2015 alone, more than 1.6 million people were newly displaced by events, including the fall of the city of Idlib and other areas in Idlib governorate to non-State armed groups from March to May 2015, which led over 300,000 people to flee their homes.

11. These incidents and many others demonstrate the grave challenges and the difficulty of predicting and responding to massive displacement flows caused by the shifting dynamics and multiple fronts of the conflict. The prospects for new displacement and mass population movement is high given the instability in many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic and the ongoing conflict with armed opposition groups, as well as the devastating role of ISIL. Dire

[2] See www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16008&LangID=E.

[3] See www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/2014/syria-forsaken-idps-adrift-inside-a-fragmenting-state.

warnings from the United Nations predict that the conflict could displace hundreds of thousands more if it continues unabated.

12. Before the conflict, the Syrian Arab Republic was considered a middle-income, developing country. According to the United Nations:

> Syria's development situation has regressed almost by four decades. Since the onset of the crisis in 2011, life expectancy is estimated to have shortened by almost 13 years (Q4, 2013) and school attendance dropped more than 50 per cent. The Syrian Arab Republic has also seen reversals in all 12 Millennium Development Goal indicators. The Syrian economy has contracted by an estimated 40 per cent since 2011, leading to the majority of Syrians losing their livelihoods.[4]

By the end of 2013, an estimated three in four Syrians were living in poverty, and 54 per cent were living in extreme poverty.[5]

13. While inside the Syrian Arab Republic at the end of 2015, an estimated 13.5 million people remain in need of protection and humanitarian assistance[6], the situation of internally displaced persons is particularly grave and potentially life threatening. Many fled with few possessions or financial resources. While many have fled the conflict and the indiscriminate bombardments or ground attacks, others left due to fear of violence or remain in locations that may fall under different areas of control or shifting front lines. Some have moved in search of or to reunite with family members or owing to economic and social deterioration. Poverty has left many needing to seek employment, better living conditions or more readily available food and fuel, for example in locations where humanitarian assistance is more easily accessible.

14. The Syrian conflict presents an extremely complex and challenging humanitarian crisis situation. The situation of many internally displaced persons, particularly those under areas controlled by ISIL, is largely unknown and deeply worrying. Equally, more than 400,000 persons are living in besieged areas, with little or no access for humanitarian actors. Factors hindering the humanitarian response include the complex conflict and security situation, restriction on access to humanitarian agencies, and the current shortfall in international funding for essential assistance. Government and non-State armed opposition groups have also been accused by investigators of using civilian suffering, such as blocking access to food, water and health services, as a method of war in contravention to international humanitarian law.

15. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre stated in October 2014 that:

> The Syrian authorities have not only failed to protect civilians from or during displacement, but their deliberate targeting of non-combatants has also been the main cause for their massive displacement. Sieges, checkpoints and international border restrictions have prevented civilians in need of protection from fleeing to safer areas, either within or outside the country. For their part, several fundamentalist Islamist groups have also forced civilians to flee and carried out human rights violations that have led to their displacement.[7]

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[4] See www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis.

[5] Syria Centre for Policy Research, *Syria Squandering Humanity – Socio-economic Monitoring Report on Syria*, (2014). Available at www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/scpr_report_q3-q4_2013_270514final_3.pdf.

[6] Humanitarian needs overview for the Syrian Arab Republic See www.unocha.org/syria.

[7] See www internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/2014/syria-forsaken-idps-adrift-inside-a-fragmenting-state/.

16. Displacement has been to both rural and urban areas depending on the nature and extent of localized violence and factors such as restrictions on movement for some internally displaced persons. As the conflict intensified and affected large urban centres and the duration of displacement increased, internally displaced persons also sought to move further afield to larger urban centres, seeking safety, assistance and livelihood options. Consequently, some urban areas have seen the displacement of entire populations, while others have seen large increases in their populations putting a heavy strain on essential services. Increasingly, internally displaced persons have sought refuge outside the country as safe options have diminished within the Syrian Arab Republic.

17. The Special Rapporteur visited the city of Homs. The extent of the devastation to some parts of the city made clear the trauma and psychosocial distress that must have affected those who experienced the conflict, were besieged and were forced to flee their homes, as well as the extent of the challenges facing the Government in rebuilding destroyed buildings and infrastructure for people to return to their homes in numerous locations. Return to many former residential areas will be impossible before large-scale demolition and reconstruction can take place.

III. Legal, policy and institutional frameworks for protection and assistance to internally displaced persons

18. The humanitarian crisis was categorized by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as an L3 humanitarian emergency in January 2013 to ensure a collective prioritization by humanitarian agencies and to scale up the humanitarian response. While the guidelines of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee recognize that an L3 activation should ideally only last during the set-up phase of a humanitarian operation and for a limited time only, recognizing that the Syrian crisis continues to evolve and increase in complexity and scale, it was considered that the situation continued to warrant L3 designation. International humanitarian operations have been led from different hubs, including the country operation in the Syrian Arab Republic and cross-border assistance from Turkey and Jordan. In September 2014, based on Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), a "Whole of Syria" approach was adopted, bringing all operations under a single framework to maximize efficiency, reduce duplication and ensure greater accountability, effectiveness and reach of humanitarian programming.[8]

19. There is currently no national legal or policy framework for the protection of internally displaced persons that would help to enhance an effective and timely response to their needs. According to many of those consulted, this greatly hampers the ability for national and regional governments and other partners to respond effectively to internal displacement with coordinated and clearly defined protection and accountability mechanisms, structures, procedures and dedicated budgets. Moreover, existing laws have not been amended to address major issues arising from the conflict, such as housing, land and property issues or access to documentation.

20. National and international partners expressed their concerns regarding the lack of such national legal or policy frameworks and the consequent ad hoc and reactive nature of responses, as well as the lack of clarity regarding institutional responsibility. Such frameworks, in accordance with the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, would clearly define responsibilities across line ministries and other dedicated bodies,

[8] See www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria.

including the High Committee for Relief and the Ministry for Social Affairs, and allow for more coherent and legally based responses, with budgets in place.

21. The High Committee for Relief is a government establishment responsible for the immediate response to the needs of affected populations, including internally displaced families and returnees. The Reconstruction Committee is mandated to rehabilitate damaged infrastructure and public facilities, contribute to funding the construction of housing units for temporary residence and to compensate citizens for property damage.[9] Both bodies are chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs. While they have coordination functions across relevant bodies, line ministries, including the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Affairs and Local Administration, are key government actors in the delivery of assistance in line with their sectoral responsibilities. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is a key implementing partner for the Government and the United Nations in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

22. Data on the displacement situation in the Syrian Arab Republic remain partial, frequently inaccurate and unverifiable. Mapping of internally displaced persons' locations, population flows and comprehensive needs assessments, including assessments of protection issues and concerns, are also urgently required to ensure that assistance can be deployed rapidly and programmes established where they are needed most. Factors preventing such assessment include the security situation and the need for government approval for such activities, as well as its concerns over assessment and monitoring activities. In view of the frequently shifting dynamics and complex nature of the conflict, flexible mechanisms are required to respond to a constantly evolving situation and new displacement flows.

23. Access to besieged cities and areas under the control of armed opposition groups has often been difficult or impossible. The vast scale of displacement has made data-gathering challenging, since displacement has taken place in all regions. Many Syrians have also been displaced multiple times since the conflict began, making them difficult to monitor and track, while registration of internally displaced persons has been sporadic. Owing to the security situation and lack of access, data-gathering was not possible in zones under the control of ISIL and al-Nusrah Front.

IV. Critical humanitarian and human rights challenges

24. In the collective shelters for internally displaced persons that the Special Rapporteur visited, they expressed their general satisfaction with the assistance and services being provided. Parents reported that their children were attending schools and most facilities had some form of primary health-care services in place. Nevertheless, many internally displaced persons remain living in cramped and basic shelters, with several family members sharing a single room and with communal bathing and cooking facilities, many months or years after their displacement. Most are entirely reliant on humanitarian assistance for food, medicine, water and sanitation and essential non-food items. The majority lack income-generating activities and have little prospect of return to their homes or improvement of their living conditions.

25. While the Special Rapporteur welcomed the Government's actions to date to respond to the needs of internally displaced persons, he highlighted that he saw only the very tip of a massive displacement iceberg. Only a small minority of internally displaced persons are in collective shelters, while the vast majority are living with host families where

[9] Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, communications to the Special Rapporteur, 31 May and 12 June 2013, respectively.

they may not receive regular assistance, if any at all. Those in the camps that he visited are in relatively safe locations and with good conditions and services. Many hundreds of thousands of other internally displaced persons are facing dire circumstances and insecurity and lack basic services. The following sections present an overview of some of the most critical humanitarian and human rights challenges.

A. Access to internally displaced persons

26. The Security Council, in its resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2254 (2015) and 2258 (2015), respectively, called on all parties in the conflict to permit free access to humanitarian aid and allow direct humanitarian access across four border crossings not controlled by the Government of the Syria Arab Republic. However, United Nations and civil society representatives expressed concern regarding the lack of or restricted access to many areas of the country, besieged cities and, consequently, many persons affected by the conflict, including internally displaced persons and other civilians in desperate need of assistance.

27. Access is severely limited by the security environment and the complex and frequently changing dynamics and shifting lines of the conflict. The safety of humanitarian personnel cannot be guaranteed in some locations, including those areas under the de facto control of ISIL and some other non-State armed actors and extremist and listed terrorist groups. While government representatives highlighted security as an important consideration, the Special Rapporteur emphasized that security should not be used as a blanket means to restrict access to certain areas or conflict-affected populations or obstruct the delivery of aid to areas held by non-State armed groups.

28. Equally, bureaucratic barriers imposed by the authorities have had a significant impact on humanitarian actors' access to internally displaced persons and vulnerable communities, and their operational effectiveness. The need for government approval for almost all operations, including missions to identify protection needs and monitor evolving situations, has proven cumbersome and time-consuming. Requests were frequently subject to delays or last-minute rejection, which created an unpredictable environment for humanitarian actors and the delivery of services and protection measures. As of December 2015, there were 47 pending United Nations inter-agency convoy requests awaiting approval by the Syrian authorities.[10]

29. At the time of the Special Rapporteur's visit, humanitarian actors highlighted requirements that all missions of humanitarian personnel were accompanied by representatives of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent or the High Committee for Relief, although they stated that was not always enforced in practice. Humanitarian agencies have noted unsuccessful requests for access to some areas and the frequent suspension of approvals for humanitarian deliveries to some opposition-held areas. The Special Rapporteur nevertheless welcomes positive progress reported with regard to the Government's issuance of visas for United Nations humanitarian staff.

30. In his report on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/561), the Secretary-General states that as many as 4.6 million people are residing in areas that are difficult for humanitarian actors to reach, with more than 422,000 residing in besieged areas. There is an urgent requirement to identify assistance and protection needs in such hard-to-reach and besieged areas where there is no

[10] Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Security Council briefing on the Syrian Arab Republic, 21 December 2015.

permanent presence of humanitarian actors, including in areas under the control of ISIL and some other non-State armed group and those areas that are besieged. At the time of the Special Rapporteur's visit, persistent insecurity rendered some governorates, including Deir-ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa completely inaccessible. The United Nations and its partners were able to reach only 32 per cent of hard-to-reach locations from September to November 2015.

31. The World Food Programme has estimated that a planned 600,000 beneficiaries in the ISIL-controlled governorates of Deir ez-Zor and Ar-Raqqa have been out of reach of humanitarian assistance since 2014.[11] In addition, ISIL has consistently stopped the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from sending water treatment supplies to those governorates. Equally, other armed opposition groups have created barriers to the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance. When the Nasib border crossing between the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan was closed after the Free Syrian Army took over the area, UNICEF was unable to treat 500,000 litres of water. An estimated 490,000 children were not reached by polio vaccination campaigns due to insecurity and denial of access by ISIL.

B. Documentation and registration

32. An urgent concern for many internally displaced persons is the loss of their personal documents, in particular identification documents, which has significant implications for their security and access to services, assistance and employment. Without documents, their freedom of movement and ability to reach safe locations may be severely restricted, placing them in danger or stranding them in conflict-affected areas as they are hindered in passing checkpoints. Such documents are also necessary for registration as internally displaced persons in order to receive some essential services or access to facilities.

33. While assurances were provided to the Special Rapporteur that the replacement of essential identity documents is ongoing, some 50 per cent of civil affairs departments in the Syrian Arab Republic have reportedly been destroyed and long delays were reportedly experienced by those seeking to replace documents. Problems exist with regard to all forms of civil documentation, including the registration of births, deaths and marriages, and measures are urgently required to remedy this situation; the setting up of mobile documentation services and regional and local documentation offices should be considered, as necessary, for example. There is a risk that people will become stateless in the absence of birth registration and that some undocumented children will experience challenges in their access to education.

34. Some of those consulted noted that replacing documents was highly problematic due to the security climate and that it could take months for documents to be replaced. Men, particularly those of fighting age, may face or fear arrest without valid documents. For those who have left areas controlled by non-State armed groups without documents, for example, the process of engaging with the authorities to replace or renew documents may create anxiety, particularly for men of fighting age, since reports suggest that they may be forcibly recruited, harassed or even arrested by security forces suspicious of people from opposition areas.

35. Some positive steps have been taken to address documentation issues. A legal aid programme funded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) includes counselling and assistance on documentation and registration issues. In 2015, close to 10,000 people benefited from that programme. Measures to raise awareness

[11] See http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/Public/documents/ep/WFP273846.pdf.

of the importance of personal status documentation and existing procedures and build the capacities of local non-governmental organizations to provide internally displaced persons with technical assistance and legal advice have also been important.

C. Shelter and non-food items

36. At the time of his visit, the Special Rapporteur was informed that there were 618 government shelters hosting about 350,000 internally displaced persons. More long-term shelter and housing solutions are urgently required and priority should be given to the most vulnerable, including internally displaced persons in unsafe locations, informal camps, tents and shelter that is unsuitable for extreme high and low temperatures. Additional challenges will be faced in the winter months for those internally displaced persons who lack adequate heated shelter as temperatures fall sharply. Many were forced to flee without their possessions or any essential household items and are in urgent need of basic items like mattresses, blankets, hygiene kits and kitchen sets.

37. The situation of internally displaced persons outside of collective shelters throughout the country is cause for serious concern. Fewer than 5 per cent of internally displaced persons find shelter in official collective centres set up by the Government. The majority lives with host families or in private accommodation, makeshift camps and scattered informal settlements, damaged or unfinished buildings. It is imperative to put in place all necessary mechanisms to map, provide information to and assist those internally displaced persons living outside of camps who are the hardest to reach.

38. The vast majority of internally displaced persons have been housed with families and communities, who have absorbed the huge influx of desperate displaced persons. However, that places a heavy burden on families and must not be considered a permanent solution, but rather a temporary measure until more durable solutions are possible. Support to host families is also essential since many may face the same survival challenges as those displaced. The impact on children is particularly profound and all initiatives should be taken to provide specialist care and psychosocial support to children, in particular unaccompanied children.

39. Providing shelter solutions for internally displaced persons in the Syrian context presents numerous challenges. The shifting and rapidly changing dynamics of the conflict create sudden emergency scenarios that are difficult to respond to with shelter solutions. The ability to respond effectively to sudden emergencies with shelter options needs to be significantly enhanced. Humanitarian organizations providing emergency shelter often have to deal with onerous administrative requirements in a highly regulated environment with lengthy formal procedures.

40. The lack of financial resources of most internally displaced persons means that many may have to leave rented accommodation, while the pressure on host families may also lead some internally displaced persons to seek alternative solutions in informal camps or disused buildings. In view of the massive and evolving shelter crisis, all parties must consider formulating housing plans and activities to increase the available shelter options for use by internally displaced persons. Adequate collective facilities should be identified and made ready as soon as possible, while to the extent possible avoiding the use of functioning school buildings and other essential buildings. For most internally displaced persons, housing should be provided free of charge in the short to medium term, with a transition to controlled rent based on the availability of cash payments to internally displaced persons where necessary and appropriate, and where livelihood options are available.

41. The importance of adequately addressing housing, land and property issues that have arisen as a result of the crisis through clear policies is clear. Although laws exist in respect

to housing land and property, they have not been amended or updated to respond to the conflict and are currently not fit to address issues arising from the displacement crisis in the short, medium or long term.

D. Access to food

42. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme confirmed in late July 2015 that about 9.8 million Syrians are currently suffering from food insecurity, including 6.8 million who require urgent food aid.[12] Agricultural production and livestock populations have plummeted since the conflict began, while food prices have sharply increased with the decline of government support and the devaluation of the Syrian currency. The price of bread has risen over the past year by up to 87 per cent in public bakeries. Internally displaced persons, who have frequently exhausted their financial resources and lost their access to land or income-generating activities, are reliant on food assistance.

43. UNICEF reports that the crisis has led to a dramatic increase in malnutrition among children.[13] An assessment of the nutritional status of displaced children conducted in 2014, the first since the crisis began, rated the level of global acute malnutrition in Aleppo, Hama and Deir ez-Zor governorates as "serious" and the overall nutrition situation as "poor". Soaring food prices have forced families to reduce the number of daily meals and to eat lower quality and less nutritious foods. Nutrition services are provided through 60 UNICEF-supported centres across the country, many of which have mobile teams to reach women and children in isolated and hard-to-reach locations.[14] While the World Food Programme, UNICEF and other humanitarian partners are reaching millions with essential food and cash assistance each month, they lack the capacity, resources and access to reach all those affected.

44. In the collective centres visited by the Special Rapporteur in government-controlled areas, internally displaced persons generally reported good access to nutritional food, commonly prepared in communal kitchens. While food supplies appeared adequate, some internally displaced persons noted that the number of daily meals had been reduced in their collective facility.

45. An urgent assessment of the food needs of those in hard-to-reach areas is essential together with the full access of humanitarian partners to internally displaced persons and other populations to enable them to deliver much needed aid. However, by mid-2015, lacking new funding, the World Food Programme reported that it had had to begin to scale down food aid by one fifth, and food vouchers by as much as half for some displaced communities, and would have to further reduce its food aid and cash assistance. By September 2015, the UNICEF 2015 nutrition programme remained only 10 per cent funded.

E. Access to health care

46. National and international humanitarian partners have made vital efforts to reach those in need of medical attention with significant results. Key achievements under the 2015 Strategic Response Plan include: over 13 million people received medical care; 2.3 million

[12] See http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp263836.pdf.

[13] http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/syria_83147.html

[14] An additional 15 nutrition centres will be established in Homs, Hama and Aleppo by the end of 2015, bringing the total to 75.

children were vaccinated against polio and 1.6 million for measles, mumps and rubella; 1.3 million people were reached with nutrition interventions; and over 6.2 million were provided with safe drinking water. However, in March 2015, the World Health Organization also highlighted that, across the Syrian Arab Republic, some 57 per cent of public hospitals are only partially functioning or are completely out of service.[15] Local production of medicines has been reduced by 70 per cent and many life-saving treatments are not available. The number of available health professionals has fallen to approximately 45 per cent of 2011 levels and there are severe shortages of surgeons, anaesthesiologists, laboratory professionals and female health professionals.

47. Health centres and health workers have reportedly been targeted by shelling and air strikes. Since conflict broke out in March 2011 until December 2015, 697 medical personnel have been killed following 336 attacks on at least 240 medical facilities according to the non-governmental organization Physicians for Human Rights. Since 2011, immunization rates across the country have fallen from 99 per cent to just 52 per cent due to lack of access and severe damage to health structures. The World Health Organization also noted that the combined effects of economic sanctions, currency fluctuations, the scarcity of hard currency, a disrupted supply chain and fuel shortages have also had an indirect impact on the availability of medicines and medical supplies.

48. For internally displaced persons, access to health care is particularly difficult and challenges are faced by those who are most vulnerable, including pregnant women, persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses, older persons, and children. Internally displaced persons may face particular health issues as a result of living in crowded, often unhygienic conditions, including skin diseases due to water shortages, lack of sanitation and waste management and exposure to extreme temperatures. A lack of water or availability of only polluted water are major issues and the cause of diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases prevalent under collective shelter and camp conditions. Conflict-related injuries and psychological trauma continue to be major health concerns among internally displaced populations, since many have fled conflict-affected areas.

49. Even in formal collective centres for internally displaced persons, conditions are overcrowded and conducive to the spreading of communicable diseases. Conditions in the many informal settlements are far worse and are often characterized by a lack of basic services, limited access to clean water and sanitation and little, if any, medical provision. In the hot summer months, with little clean water available, an increasing number of patients were reported to have contaminated-water-related diseases, such as typhoid and hepatitis A, and intestinal infections, such as dysentery and amoebiasis.[16] The health-care situation of internally displaced persons in hard-to-reach and besieged areas or in ISIL-controlled territories is particularly difficult to assess.

F. Access to education

50. The disruption to the education system has been massive and an estimated 2 million children are out of school. UNICEF warned in September 2015 that a further 400,000 children were at risk of dropping out of school as a direct result of conflict, violence and displacement.[17] While basic education facilities were in place in the displacement centres visited by the Special Rapporteur, such centres, often using school buildings, offer only limited education facilities. For many children displaced by conflict, access to education is

[15] See www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50444#.VubbivkrJpg.
[16] See http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/25/opinions/msf-yarmouk/.
[17] See www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51880.

particularly problematic and numerous challenges and barriers exist, including lack of functioning facilities. Education is often a low priority for families fleeing conflict and violence and focused on survival.

51. Some 5,000 school buildings across the country cannot be used as they have been damaged or destroyed by the conflict, used as displacement centres or are occupied by armed forces (some are located in ISIL-controlled areas, where only a limited number of schools are open). Others are in locations that are too dangerous to access. Some reports suggest that schools have been deliberately targeted for attack. Where schools are functioning, an influx of displaced children puts pressure on their facilities and impacts on the education facilities available to those children who have not been displaced. Even for those displaced children lucky enough to have access to classrooms, the trauma and psychosocial impact of their displacement is likely to have a major impact on their education.

52. UNICEF is working with local partners to reach some 3 million children and has implemented an informal education programme to reduce the number of children out of school. The inter-agency initiative "No Lost Generation" is a self-learning programme aimed at reaching 500,000 children who missed out on years of schooling. In areas hosting high numbers of displaced children, UNICEF is also rehabilitating 600 damaged schools and creating 300 prefabricated classrooms to accommodate 300,000 additional children. In addition to giving education, schools also provide important additional functions, as places of routine and normality, play, safety and support for children traumatized by conflict.

53. Nevertheless the challenge of providing even basic education access to many internally displaced children, particularly those in hard-to-reach locations, is immense and many thousands of children are likely to remain out of education for the foreseeable future. UNICEF had reported that it would require US$ 68 million by end of 2015, of which $12 million was needed immediately, in order to continue responding to children's educational needs.

G. Security and freedom of movement

54. In many locations, the security situation is highly dangerous. The civilian casualty toll is very high and the extreme nature of the violence by all sides has been characterized by the targeting of civilian and residential areas and infrastructure. In February 2014, the Security Council in its resolution 2139 (2014) demanded all parties end the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas. Nevertheless, the use of heavy weapons, including barrel bombs dropped on residential areas, has continued. Contamination due to explosive remnants of war is also a major impediment to safe movement or return in many parts of the country.

55. ISIL has waged a campaign of terror in the areas of northern and eastern parts of the Syrian Arab Republic under its control. Its fighters have carried out mass killings of the security forces, members of rival armed groups and religious minorities, as well as inflicting severe punishments, including public executions, beheadings and amputations. The activities of all armed actors are leading to mass displacement and there is little, if any, regard for civilian safety and international humanitarian or human rights law. The extent of the violence and the shifting dynamics of the conflict mean that some civilians may be displaced multiple times and some may remain in conditions of insecurity even in collective shelters.

56. The Special Rapporteur was concerned by allegations that the Government is actively preventing internally displaced persons and those from some ethnic or religious groups, notably Sunnis, from moving to government-controlled areas and turning them back

at checkpoints. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "the protection space for Syrians trying to escape the conflict is steadily shrinking. Serious funding shortfalls endanger the lives of the most vulnerable segments of Syria's displaced population … civilians have fled to dwindling safe havens inside the Syrian Arab Republic, or over its borders" (see A/HRC/30/48, paras. 22-23).

57. According to the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/561):

> Indiscriminate aerial bombings, including the use of barrel bombs, by Government forces and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed groups and extremist and listed terrorist groups left hundreds of civilians dead and injured and thousands more displaced. The conduct of hostilities by all parties continued to be characterized by widespread disregard for the rules of international humanitarian law and the parties' obligation to protect civilians. Fighting affecting civilians was particularly severe in the governorates of Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Aleppo, Idlib, Dar'a, Hasakah and Homs.

58. A feature of the Syrian conflict has been the use of siege tactics that restrict movement of civilians out of conflict areas. It is a fundamental right of civilians to seek safety and to flee conflict zones without restriction. In February 2016, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator estimated that 486,700 people were living in 19 identified besieged locations.[18] Under siege conditions, civilians are surrounded by armed actors who may block humanitarian access over an extended period of time. Civilians, including the sick and wounded, have frequently been restricted from exiting the areas even in cases of medical emergencies, which has led to many civilian deaths.

59. The Special Rapporteur was informed of patterns of detention of internally displaced men by government forces – frequently at checkpoints – and of those identified as coming from areas controlled by non-State armed groups. Investigations identify a countrywide pattern of seizure and disappearance of adult male civilians by government forces and non-State armed groups alike. It was evident to the Special Rapporteur that the vast majority of internally displaced persons in the collective centres that he visited were women, children and older persons.

60. The Commission of Inquiry stated the following (see A/HRC/30/48, para. 44):

> The Government's ubiquitous checkpoints have vastly limited the freedom of movement of men seeking to leave opposition-held areas. Civilian men are effectively trapped in areas in which there may be heavy clashes or intense aerial bombardments. Even in calmer areas or periods, the specific threats posed to civilian men from Government checkpoints have prevented them from accessing work and therefore, from being able to provide for their families. Multiple accounts have been documented of women leaving their husbands behind in opposition-held areas to accompany their pre-adolescent sons through the checkpoints and out of the area before they reach an age where they are likely to be stopped by Government forces.

61. The Special Rapporteur was concerned by the location of at least one camp for internally displaced persons that he visited at one hour's drive from Damascus, which appeared to be close to the front line and in a heavily militarized location. His concerns were amplified when two airstrikes took place within a few kilometres of the camp as he toured

[18] See http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-29.

the site. While those internally displaced persons he talked to stated that they were well treated and had the necessary basic services, it was evident that movement out of the camp, for example to travel to Damascus or other locations, would be difficult due to the distance and the checkpoints and potentially hazardous. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes the need for collective displacement facilities to be in safe locations, civilian in character and away from the front line or any military operations, and for internally displaced persons to be able to freely move outside camps, including to access markets and opportunities for earning a livelihood.

62. United Nations agencies have noted that there has been significant increase in protection services provided and awareness-raising by partners of the Protection and Community Services Sector, which in 2015 reached 3.5 million persons in 111 sub-districts of the country, and through 30 national partners. This is a positive increase from the 1.15 million reached in 2014. However, the protection needs are of such magnitude that efforts of humanitarian actors to support duty bearers in providing protection responses need to be further enhanced.

V. Particularly vulnerable groups

63. The Special Rapporteur was particularly concerned about the protection issues and assistance challenges associated with specific, highly vulnerable groups of internally displaced persons, including children, women and girls, older persons, persons with disabilities, those from targeted ethnic or religious groups, and Palestinian refugees. There remains a lack of information and data or comprehensive needs assessment regarding such vulnerable groups and their circumstances. Older persons and those with disabilities, for example, may face challenges in trying to flee far from the conflict areas. Their coping mechanisms are weaker than those of others, which means that they are more heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance and require dedicated support, which may only be available to them in secure collective centres.

A. Women and girls and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

64. Women make up more than half of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. It was noticeable that the vast majority of internally displaced persons in camps visited by the Special Rapporteur were women and children. A number of factors explain the absence of men, including their involvement in the conflict as combatants. They may have been separated from their families or detained for "screening", or left their families voluntarily to avoid recruitment or possible detention. Some are suspected of supporting non-State armed groups. Consequently there has been a rise in female-headed households and family separation is a major concern that renders women and children vulnerable. All efforts should be taken to maintain family unity. While legitimate security concerns must be addressed, any systematic or long-term separation of men from their families without due cause or legal justification must not take place.

65. Under the prevailing conditions of conflict and mass displacement, women and children are extremely vulnerable to violations of their rights and violence, including sexual violence. Indeed, information indicates an increase in sexual and gender-based violence due to forced displacement, family separation, overcrowded conditions and the breakdown of normal societal safeguards. The phenomenon of "survival sex" was reportedly rising among internally displaced women. Credible reports indicate that women and girls trapped in conflict areas under the control of ISIL face sexual slavery, trafficking and rape. Some specific ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable, such as Yazidis and those from ethnic and religious communities targeted by ISIL.

66. The Government strengthened the importance it gave to protection matters, which was a welcome and essential development, including through the creation in December 2014 of the Child and Women's Unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs to strengthen protection and develop local capacity for the protection of women and children.[19] However, responses to sexual and gender-based violence are mostly provided by the international community and are strongest in Damascus with a relative lack of capacity in other regions.

B. Child protection

67. The extent of the conflict and displacement has inevitably had a massive impact on children. Many children have experienced violence first-hand and/or witnessed extreme violence, including the killing of family members and/or separation from family members. Child protection concerns and issues, including child labour resulting from parent's loss of livelihood, trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and early and forced marriage, continue to be reported. Children have also been recruited and used by different parties to the conflict, both in combat and support roles. Reports indicate that displaced boys considered to be of fighting age continue to be detained and treated as adults at checkpoints.

68. Thousands of children have been killed or maimed in the conflict, including internally displaced children fleeing their homes. The harrowing experiences of children, including their displacement from their homes, often multiple times, may leave them traumatized and in need of psychosocial care. However, such care is limited at best or may be absent in many locations where health-care provision is basic at best. In some cases, children find themselves as heads of households and need additional support.

C. Minorities and refugee populations

69. While all of the different population groups of the Syrian Arab Republic are affected by the conflict, increasingly sectarian elements to the conflict may result in the targeting of certain population groups on the basis of their ethnicity or religious identity and patterns of displacement along ethnic and religious lines. The Commission of Inquiry noted that "competition among regional powers for influence has resulted, among other consequences, in an alarming exacerbation of the sectarian dimension, instigated by the intervention of foreign fighters and extremist clerics" (see A/HRC/30/48, para. 9). This development has implications for the nature and extent of displacement, its impact on specific groups and the need for immediate and longer-term solutions that take into account such group dynamics.

70. The appalling attacks on and persecution of Yazidis by ISIL since August 2014 is the most high-profile example of sectarian violence, however other instances have been perpetrated by ISIL, government forces and other non-State armed groups and extremist and listed terrorist groups. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre highlighted that "in opposition areas, the rise of hundreds of extremist groups left very little space for minorities such as Christians, Shiites, Druze and Yazidis who have been targeted simply on the basis of their identity. Sunni civilians who did not submit to the socio-political vision of these groups were similarly not spared".[20]

[19] The Unit was subsequently dismantled in December 2015 and its responsibilities transferred to the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs in early 2016, under the Ministry of Social Affairs

[20] See www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/2014/syria-forsaken-idps-adrift-inside-a-fragmenting-state.

71. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic hosts some 560,000 registered Palestinian refugees and has been providing support to these communities for decades. However, these communities are now highly vulnerable and some 64 per cent have been displaced: to date 280,000 have been displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic and a further 80,000 abroad. Some Palestinians reportedly remain trapped between warring parties inside Yarmouk, a refugee camp on the edge of Damascus, in which fighting flared in April 2015. The Government is urged to continue to fully support and provide necessary security to those affected communities and displaced Palestinian refugees.

72. In addition to refugees registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the plight of 21,252 refugees registered by UNHCR (as of 13 February 2016), originating mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and South Sudan, as well as Palestinians who fled Iraq and cannot be registered with by the Agency, should be monitored, as their protection situation has also been negatively affected by the conflict.

VI. Progress towards establishing durable solutions

73. In the context of the brutal conflict, the targeting of civilians and the widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure, prospects for durable solutions in the form of secure, voluntary return of internally displaced persons, their local integration or resettlement elsewhere in the country are seriously limited. Some returns are taking place, including in areas re-taken by government forces or where conflict has abated or ended. This was evident, for example, in some areas of Homs and in a few localities around Damascus. However, many areas of cities and towns, including in Homs, Aleppo, Idlib and Kobane, have suffered such complete devastation that demolition and reconstruction of homes and other buildings and infrastructure will be necessary before any safe return will be possible.

74. It is imperative that any returns are informed, voluntary, dignified, secure and assisted and that they are based upon the most accurate information provided to internally displaced persons. Some locations remain dangerous due to the proximity of the conflict or combatants, a lack of functioning infrastructure and services, unexploded ordnance and a level of destruction that may render buildings unsafe. The Special Rapporteur witnessed some small-scale initiatives to build resilience, early recovery and livelihoods for internally displaced persons and host communities. This is vitally important to individuals, families and displaced communities, particularly those whose displacement has already been protracted, allowing them to earn an income, restoring their dignity and helping a wider process of integration into new locations.

75. The Special Rapporteur was informed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of initiatives in the area of early recovery and to build resilience in response to the needs of internally displaced persons. While currently on a limited scale and with few resources, UNDP early recovery, resilience and livelihood interventions have nevertheless targeted 14 highly affected governorates and incorporated over 100 projects, many implemented in collaboration with local partner organizations. Some 60 per cent of the projects are servicing internally displaced persons while the remaining 40 per cent target host communities. From 2014 to 2015, UNDP succeeded in reaching a total of 4.5 million affected persons, who were directly or indirectly impacted by the projects.

76. The UNDP projects are in such areas as emergency employment, restoration and stabilization of disrupted livelihoods, emergency support to vulnerable groups, capacity development for early recovery and resilience and coordination, advocacy and technical assistance. Practical projects include small business revival and restoration, including in the areas of food production and processing, small-scale manufacturing (for example of shoes

and concrete blocks), solid debris/waste removal and sewing workshops, re-establishing markets and stimulating local economies by encouraging local production and procurement. Vocational training that includes entrepreneurship promotion activities has been provided, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including female-headed households, persons with disabilities and young people.[21]

77. In the light of the high numbers of people leaving the country, such initiatives provide much needed hope for the future and a reason for people to remain in the country and begin rebuilding their lives, where security permits. The current projects fill an important transitional need that exists between humanitarian assistance and development projects and should be maintained and expanded wherever possible.

VII. The role of the international community

78. The primary responsibility for ensuring protection of the human rights of internally displaced persons rests with the Government, yet it undeniably faces an immense task that it cannot cope with alone. It is clear that an urgent and coordinated response from the Government and national and international humanitarian organizations working in stronger partnership with each other is required.

79. Funding for humanitarian response inside the Syrian Arab Republic has not kept pace with the increasing needs. The Special Rapporteur was concerned to learn from United Nations agencies that funding for essential humanitarian assistance amounted to only one third of the requirements needed for the 2015 Strategic Response Plan and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan to be implemented in full. The combined plans call for $7.42 billion, of which only $2.38 billion had been received by September 2015.

80. The international community must urgently bolster support to humanitarian and development agencies working tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of the millions of internally displaced persons and other people affected by the displacement crisis. Equally, the Government must allow United Nations and other humanitarian actors, including international non-governmental organizations, to function freely and with unhindered access to all locations and internally displaced populations. Bureaucratic and other restrictions on full and rapid access to internally displaced persons and at-risk communities are a major impediment to their work and effectiveness and should be lifted.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

General comments

81. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is one of vast proportions and has resulted in millions of ordinary civilians being displaced from their homes, often multiple times, and left in conditions of insecurity, poverty and uncertainty. They have frequently lost their homes, family members, possessions, income sources and essential family and social networks and support mechanisms. As the conflict enters its sixth year, the crisis has evolved beyond the borders of the Syrian Arab Republic into an exodus of traumatized, impoverished and war-weary civilians with far-reaching regional and even global implications. Millions of Syrians have fled the country to date and many others may follow their lead. Internally displaced persons who see no

[21] UNDP, *365 Days of Resilience in Syria* (2014). See www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/library/poverty/365-days-of-resilience-in-syria.html.

solutions ahead for them within the country inevitably look elsewhere for sanctuary and will increasingly do so until peace returns to the country and new, viable options of security and protection, housing and livelihood, and a secure future of durable solutions are provided to them. Internal displacement has become a staging-post to a wider refugee crisis of immense proportions.

82. While Syrian refugees in the region and Europe have been the subject of significant international attention and political debate, it must not be forgotten that those who remain displaced or besieged inside the Syrian Arab Republic are at the greatest risk of violence and human rights violations. It is imperative that they receive the political attention and humanitarian assistance and protection that they urgently require. Containing and ultimately beginning the long road to resolving the displacement crisis will only be possible if all stakeholders – the Government, non-State armed groups and the international community – resolve to put the lives and human rights of the millions of innocent civilian victims first. This requires a cessation of the conflict that is having such a devastating impact on the Syrian people and the re-establishment of security and the rule of law by all parties in the territories, which they control. With no end in sight to the conflict, millions more could be internally displaced and the Syrian Arab Republic and the international community must do all they can to resolve the crisis.

83. Future displacement patterns and flows can and must be predicted and must be prepared for. All possible preparedness measures must be taken in the light of the high possibility that hundreds of thousands of people will be newly displaced or face renewed displacement in the coming months. This requires access to safety, identification of safe locations and shelter options, increasing of protection responses and services, and stockpiling and pre-deployment of foodstuffs, medical supplies and non-food items, among other key elements. Above all, it requires the resources and funds in place to allow humanitarian actors to undertake their vital work. The Special Rapporteur makes the following recommendations.

To the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic

84. The Government should urgently put in place a legal and policy framework for the protection of internally displaced persons in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This would improve coordination and the effectiveness and timeliness of responses to the needs of internally displaced persons with clearly defined human rights protection and accountability mechanisms, structures, procedures and dedicated budgets in place.

85. Institutional responsibility for internal displacement and internally displaced persons should be clearly defined and at the highest level of Government to ensure appropriate responses across government line ministries and all other relevant bodies.

86. The Government should give a high priority to ensuring that internally displaced persons are documented on a voluntary basis to the fullest extent possible. Where they have lost essential identity documents required for their freedom of movement and access to services, for example, all necessary measures should be taken to rapidly replace them, including issuing temporary documents, to avoid putting them at risk. Measures should be taken to ensure that births are registered in order to avoid statelessness.

87. In view of the massive and evolving shelter crisis, the Government should formulate housing plans and activities to increase the available shelter options for internally displaced persons with a priority given to the most vulnerable, including

those in unsafe locations, informal camps, disused buildings, tents and other shelters lacking basic services.

88. For impoverished internally displaced persons, housing should be provided free of charge in the short to medium term and until cash payments to internally displaced persons or livelihood projects to provide income are in place.

89. Collective displacement facilities must be in safe locations, civilian in character and away from the front line or any military operations. Internally displaced persons should be able to freely move outside collective centres, including to access markets and livelihood opportunities.

90. Longer-term solutions to housing, land and property issues, including compensation and restitution of land and property, must be envisaged and measures put in place through legal processes established in accordance with international standards.

91. The vast majority of internally displaced persons are sheltering with host families. This places a heavy burden on those families and must not be considered a temporary measure until more appropriate housing solutions are possible. Assistance must also be provided to host families who are sharing their resources and suffering food and other shortages.

92. Many thousands of internally displaced persons are living in territories controlled by non-State armed groups and ISIL and in besieged areas with little or no access to humanitarian assistance. Recognizing security issues, it is nevertheless imperative to ensure that assistance is provided to the fullest extent possible to internally displaced persons in areas not held by the Government.

93. An extensive and comprehensive mapping of internally displaced persons locations, population flows and needs assessments are required to ensure that assistance can be deployed rapidly and programmes established where they are needed most on the ground. In particular, the situation is critical for those in remote and inaccessible areas who lack regular access to food, health care and other basic services.

94. Freedom of movement of internally displaced persons and their ability to access safe locations must be guaranteed in practice. Internally displaced persons wishing to move to government- or non-government-controlled areas, including those who may have lost identity documents, must be assisted to do so without discrimination on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity or their place of origin. The use of siege tactics that deliberately restrict the ability of civilians to leave conflict areas is a grave violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.

95. Male internally displaced persons must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or other violations of their human rights, including when seeking to cross checkpoints. Family separation is a major concern and leaves women and children vulnerable. All efforts should be taken to maintain family unity and, while legitimate security concerns may be addressed, any systematic or long-term separation of men from their families without due cause or legal process must be prohibited.

96. In many locations of internally displaced persons, the shortage of water, food and medical care is urgent and is creating a risk to life particularly for those in conflict, hard-to-reach and besieged areas. No restrictions should be imposed by any party on the delivery or distribution of essential humanitarian assistance, including medical supplies, to all populations in need, wherever they are.

97. The Government must take all necessary steps to protect women, including vulnerable displaced women, from all forms of violation of their human rights.

Services to address the needs of displaced women who have experienced sexual or gender-based violence should be strengthened and extended and include psychosocial care.

98. Children have been severely affected by the crisis and have special needs and protection concerns. Special measures should therefore be taken to ensure the full realization of internally displaced children's rights to survival, education, health and protection from violence, exploitation and abuse. The availability of psychosocial care for children displaced by conflict should be extended.

99. Education must be considered as a high priority for internally displaced children and all necessary steps taken to provide functioning education facilities at all levels and in safe locations.

100. The Government must allow United Nations and other humanitarian and development actors to function freely and with unhindered access to all locations and internally displaced populations. Bureaucratic and other restrictions on full and rapid access to internally displaced persons and at-risk communities are a major impediment to their work and effectiveness and should be lifted. There should be no undue restrictions on access to conflict-affected populations or obstruction to the delivery of aid to areas held by non-State groups.

101. In view of the frequently shifting dynamics and complex nature of the conflict, the Government and humanitarian partners must predict and prepare for further mass displacement. Flexible mechanisms are required and preparations should be put in place at the earliest opportunity to respond to new displacement flows.

102. Non-State armed groups and extremist and listed terrorist groups must take responsibility for the protection of civilian populations, including internally displaced persons, who fall under their authority and take all measures to ensure their security and access to humanitarian assistance. The Government and non-State armed groups must allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian workers and ensure the freedom of movement of the civilian population.

103. During the conflict, some 85 humanitarian workers have been killed to date, while others have been detained or are missing. They must be protected and their work and operational capacity to assist internally displaced persons and other affected communities must be supported and enhanced.

Progress towards durable solutions

104. While the prevailing conditions of conflict, insecurity and destruction make progress towards durable solutions highly problematic, some essential steps must be taken to improve the circumstances of internally displaced populations. In cooperation with international development partners the Government should explore durable solutions for internally displaced persons, or transitional steps towards such solutions, that envisage their voluntary return where possible, local integration or resettlement elsewhere in the country with viable housing and livelihood programmes.

105. Durable solutions create a reason for internally displaced persons to remain in the Syrian Arab Republic (where security permits) and begin to rebuild their lives rather than seeking asylum elsewhere. Investment in livelihood opportunities is also essential. The resilience and recovery initiatives undertaken by United Nations agencies and national partners have proved effective and provide hope, dignity and much needed income. They should be provided with additional resources and expanded throughout to the fullest extent possible.

The international community

106. **The shortfall in international funding is a critical issue and the international community must continue and enhance its financial and material support for the humanitarian assistance operations inside the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations and other humanitarian and development partners urgently need resources to carry out their essential work. Adequate resources and institutions must be in place over the long term. Short-term crisis funding does not allow for adequate, durable responses to the situation of internally displaced persons and consideration should be given to extending funding cycles.**

107. **The international community must take all appropriate measures to achieve an end to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and continue and intensify its efforts to end the indiscriminate violence and achieve a lasting peace.**

108. **The international community must continue to monitor compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.**